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# SKARA BRAE ORKNEY

Official Guide

Price One Shilling

C. D. Scott

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ANCIENT MONUMENTS AND HISTORIC  
BUILDINGS, MINISTRY OF WORKS

ANCIENT DWELLINGS AT  
SKARA BRAE

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EDINBURGH  
HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE

1930

*Prefatory Note*

This guide is intended to simplify a visit to Skara Brae. The structures of one period are described in the order in which they can be conveniently visited. But the numbering used on the plans and in the notices displayed in the centre of each hut has been followed and structures older than the bulk of the ruins are described separately. Introductory sections give an account of the discovery of the ruins, the little that can be made out of the stages of their erection and demolition and the features common to all the structures. In this section terms frequently thereafter used are defined. It has been supplemented by a brief attempt to conjure up a picture of life in the village. With its aid, supplemented by attention to the notes on the several structures, the imaginative visitor may perhaps be able to think himself back into a long forgotten state of life.

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# ANCIENT DWELLINGS AT SKARA BRAE

## *Discovery and Excavation of the Site*

IN the winter of 1850, a storm of exceptional severity stripped the grass from the high dune known as Skara Brae (or Skerroo Brae) in the south corner of the Bay of Skail. An immense "midden" heap and the ruins of ancient dwellings were thereby exposed to view. The laird of Skail, William Watt, thereupon began to explore the site systematically. By 1868, four of the "huts" described below had been cleared out and a very rich collection of relics had been garnered and deposited in Skail House. The site was then left in peace, apart from some casual digging in 1913, till the end of 1923, when natural forces again came into play. By that time the ruins had been placed under the guardianship of the Commissioners of H.M. Works by W. G. T. Watt's trustees. In December a terrific storm washed away part of the midden and inflicted damage on portions of the previously cleared structures. To prevent a recurrence, the Commissioners first had the present sea-wall built to secure the foundations of the site, and subsequently undertook the consolidation of the buildings. The latter work carried on from 1927 to 1930 involved the clearing out of new dwellings and extensive soundings beneath the bases of the existing walls.

## *The "History" of the Village*

The extant ruins consist of a cluster of seven self-contained huts, connected by covered galleries or alleys. The huts are buried to the tops of the surviving walls in a huge midden-heap, consisting of peat-ash, shells, broken bones and similar refuse mixed with sand, and possessing the consistency of a clay. The same "midden" lay upon the slabs that roof the passages between the dwellings. A similar accumulation was found under the floors

of the existing huts, whose walls are not founded on rock nor on natural sand, but on the artificial soil resulting from human occupation of the site. This occupation must plainly be earlier than the erection of the huts upon its debris. As a matter of fact the ruins of older huts (four of which may still be seen) were discovered underneath the walls of the present structures. And even these ruined dwellings were in their turn built, not upon virgin soil, but upon the refuse left by still earlier inhabitants. We have, therefore, before us the remains of at least three periods, to the latest of which the principal structures here described belong. Of the first occupation nothing is now visible, but a fireplace, found on native clay in one test-pit, conformed strictly to the type exemplified in the latest structures.

Of the length of time denoted by the several "periods" we have no sort of clue. A mound 10 to 13 ft. high, formed of the refuse of seven or eight households with their cattle and sheep, might seem to denote prolonged occupation. But it is quite likely that this refuse was deliberately collected and piled up round built walls. No value, therefore, attaches to any calculations based upon assumed rates of accumulation. Similarly the successive rebuildings of the houses, indicated by the ruins of older huts, certainly means that the site was inhabited continuously over a quite considerable number of generations; the houses' foundations are certainly solid enough to last for a couple of centuries under normal conditions. But natural catastrophes may have overwhelmed the earlier settlements in a far shorter time. We can, therefore, only say that the site was inhabited for an indefinite number of generations.

Nor can any calendar dates be assigned to the occupation. It is not mentioned in any written document, and no inscription was found in the ruins; they are strictly prehistoric, and can only be dated in archeological terms. Now archeologists have divided prehistoric times into three Ages or stages according as Stone, Bronze or Iron were used for the principal cutting tools and weapons. As no trace of the use of any sort of metal tool was observed at Skara Brae while plenty of stone axes and knives were collected, the village must be assigned to the first of these stages—the Stone Age (to be exact the Neolithic or New Stone Age). But Stone Age does not denote a uniform period of time all over the world; it ended in Egypt five thousand years ago, in New Guinea only fifty! In southern England the Stone Age is supposed to have given place to a Bronze Age about 1800 B.C. with the appearance of a new people most easily recognized by the so-called Beaker, regularly found in their graves. But in a remote



GENERAL VIEW OF THE SETTLEMENT



HUT 1. SHOWING BED SPACE, DRESSER FLOOR-BOXES AND HEARTH

island innovations might be very long delayed; in 1935 no Beakers were known in Orkney and the cultural history of the islands seemed to diverge seriously from that of the rest of Britain; so dates as late as 300 B.C. could be seriously canvassed. Since then discoveries on Rousay and in England have narrowed down the limits substantially.

In 1937 the late Walter Grant discovered at Rinyo on Rousay a village, precisely similar to Skara Brae and like it occupied continually through several structural periods. In a house of the latest period and together with pottery, identical with that current in the same period at Skara Brae, was found a genuine Beaker. Subsequent excavations in 1946 recovered from older buildings, together with pottery like that of our phases I and II, other vases comparable to those found throughout the British Isles in the tombs—long barrows and chambered cairns—that were being erected before the Beaker invasion. At the same time it has been discovered that the normal local pottery made at Rinyo and Skara Brae embodies the same technical and artistic traditions as were fashionable in parts of England at least as early as the Beaker invasion. Hence the foundation of both settlements must go back to the New Stone Age in the sense in which that term is applicable to the British Isles as a whole. Of course some time-lag between Orkney and southern England must still be admitted, but the parallelism in the cultural development of each area is now found to be too close for this to have lasted many centuries.

The first settlers at Skara Brae seem to have encamped upon a sloping plain 20 to 22½ feet above sea level. There were already dunes in the vicinity, but to what extent they had encroached on the present site cannot be determined. After a time of uncertain length the period II huts were built upon (and perhaps partly in) refuse already accumulated. The rather flimsy structures of this phase were then eventually demolished. Most of the stones from the old huts were utilised in building the larger structures that replaced them, but the walls were not raised quite to the ground. The space between the wall stumps was levelled up either with a packing of refuse or with drift sand. The existing huts were built on the surface thus obtained. Skara Brae III, as the present village may be called, stood for a long time; there are signs of considerable remodelling (described below). It was eventually overwhelmed by a sudden catastrophe. The inhabitants of the huts were forced to flee from their homes, abandoning in the store rooms and on the floor many treasured possessions, fashioned with great labour and ingenuity. One woman in her haste to

squeeze through the narrow door of her home (No. 7) broke her necklace and left a stream of beads behind as she scampered up the passage (C).

But the village was not pillaged; the store rooms were intact, the furniture unbroken when the modern excavators cleared the huts of sand. The desertion of the site can hardly then have been due to a hostile raid. The cause must rather have been a natural catastrophe. We found the huts and passages choked with sand. A great storm setting the sand dunes in motion is most likely to have driven the villagers from their homes, as has happened to far better equipped folk at Culbin and elsewhere during historical times.

At Skara Brae the abandonment of the village was not immediately complete. After the hut floors had been buried by two or three feet of sand, entirely choking the doorways, some refugees returned and lit fires under the shelter of the broken walls. We have found the ashes of their hearths and the shells and deer-bones from their repasts on the sand two feet above the floor. And this happened more than once; three such layers of ash were found within the walls of hut 7. But this remnant gradually died off or departed elsewhere.

And finally, when the ruins had been entirely buried in sand, an old man and young woman were interred in rough coffins of stone slabs laid in the sand. No inscription or funerary gift gave a date to these interments, but from their orientation they would seem to be pagan, probably Norse. And therewith the story of human occupation at Skara Brae ends.

#### *General Character of the Ruins*

The ruins now conserved consist of a cluster of huts with their appurtenances. Before describing the actual remains, it is convenient to summarise certain general features common to all or nearly all the structures.

The walls are built for the most part of flagstone blocks, naturally quarried by the sea and still available in plenty on the beach to-day. Freestone slabs brought from farther afield are occasionally to be seen. A finely-bedded shale resembling slate was often used for roofs and pavements. The walls are all built without the use of lime-mortar, but the interstices were probably plugged with clay or midden material, and the outer faces were plastered thickly with clay when exposed.

The huts are roughly rectangular in plan, but the corners are always rounded. In size they vary from 21 by 20 ft. to 14 by

13 ft. The walls, standing in one case over 8 ft. high, tend to corbel inwards notably at the corners, each course projecting slightly beyond the one below. It is practically certain that this corbelling was never carried far enough to cover the whole chamber with a beehive roof. The centre, indeed, was probably always entirely open to the air, forming a big smoke-hole. The existing opening must, on the other hand, have been restricted so as to shelter the sides of the huts either (by continued corbelling) with masonry or, more probably, with skins or turfs resting on whale-bone rafters. In Tibet to-day, where climatic conditions are comparable, a tent-like superstructure of skins rests on stone foundation-walls not unlike those of the Skara Brae huts. In any case the "roof," whatever it was, must have risen above the wide wall tops. For the walls themselves were often four or more feet thick and, as stated above, were surrounded outside with refuse. The midden packing was often piled up into a regular platform 7 to 12 ft. wide, supported by a rough external retaining wall, itself often buried by subsequent accumulations of refuse.

The several huts were each entered by tunnel-like passages, piercing these thick walls, and in no case more than 4 ft. high. The entry is constituted by a pair of jambs and a threshold stone that form a doorway on an average only 3 ft. 9 in. high by 1 ft. 10 in. wide. Immediately inside the jambs may be seen, in the side walls, holes designed to hold the bar that fastened the door proper, probably a stone slab.

In the centre of every hut is a square fireplace framed by four stone kerbs. Against the walls on either side of the hearth may be seen pen-like structures formed by stone slabs set on edge. That on the right hand is always the larger, the dimensions ranging from 6 ft. 6 in. by 3 ft. 6 in. to 5 ft. by 2 ft. 9 in. These "pens" doubtless represented the beds. Similar fixed beds, only formed of planks, were in use among Norwegian peasants within living memory. In front of the "beds" at either end may be seen at least the stumps of tall slabs set on end like pillars. They may be termed "bed-posts" and very likely supported some sort of canopy over the beds. Canopies, like those here imagined, are described by Dr. Mitchell as being used last century to shelter the beds in the Hebridean "black-houses."

Immediately above the beds are generally to be seen one or two recesses in the walls like open cupboards. They presumably served as keeping-places for the personal possessions of the occupants of the bed below them. For the bed would be the nearest approach to privacy that an individual or single family could aspire to in the communal dwelling.

We must imagine the "beds" lined with bundles of heather. In such mattresses special treasures would be hidden, and we actually found in the sleeping-places fine bead necklaces and also choice joints, presumably gnawed there on the night of the disaster.

The edge of the slab bounding the sleeping-place in front served as a seat for the occupants of the bed when working or warming themselves by the fire; the upper edge is found to be worn by such use, while tools and half-finished commodities were normally encountered between the hearth and the beds.

Enclosures similar to the beds are often found also against the front wall to the left of the door, and in one of the corners. The former may well have also served as beds; those in the corners were generally paved with slates at a level rather above the hut floor.

Against the rear wall in every hut stands a curious stone cupboard generally two-storied and always supported by three "legs" in front. Such constructions may be termed dressers and very likely were so used. There are no grounds for calling them altars.

Let into the floor in one corner of every hut are three or more little boxes or cists formed of slate slabs. The joints have always been carefully luted with clay as if to make the cists water-tight, but nothing has been found in them to reveal their use. They have been called "limpet-boxes" but "tanks" might be a safer designation.

Opening off each hut are one or more cells in the thickness of the wall. Some are beehive shaped about 4 ft. in diameter and as many high in the centre. Others are like little blind passages with flat roofs. In some cells collections of fine beads and elaborately worked implements were discovered, suggesting that these served as treasure chambers. In some huts the long end of the hole in which the bar of the door slid opens into such a cell which may then be regarded as a sort of guard-room. On the other hand, drains lead away from three cells which may, therefore, have served as privies. These drains are shallow stone-lined channels roofed with flagstones.

The midden deposit, heaped up round the huts, rises high above their doorways. The passages or alleys on to which the doors opened therefore took the form of narrow tunnels generally about 4 ft. high and roofed with stone lintels. These passages are themselves interrupted by gates replete with bar-holes like the doors of individual huts. But they eventually led out on to paved areas open to the sky beyond the midden heap.

The site, indeed, must originally have appeared a low, rounded mound. From its surface we must imagine the conical or domed roofs of the several huts projecting. And tunnel-like openings in the side led down into the dwellings. These were underground only in the sense that they were buried, *after their erection*, in artificial soil.

The purpose of this peculiar arrangement was probably to secure really efficient shelter from the winds and storms so prevalent in those high latitudes. And it is certain that the villagers actually lived, worked and ate in their subterranean habitations, since they have littered the hut floors with unfinished and broken articles and the debris of repasts in a most untidy and indeed filthy manner. On the other hand, they also lived in finer weather on the surface of the mound above the alleys and between the huts, since there we found deposits very similar to those on the hut floors.

The inhabitants of the village were essentially pastoralists in the sense that they lived very largely on the products of herds and flocks. The broken bones of cattle and sheep are astoundingly numerous, both on the hut floors and in the midden, indicating the importance of beef and mutton in the villagers' menus. In the case of cattle, the bones of young animals predominated. Owing to the difficulty of supporting calves through the winter, many were evidently slaughtered. Hardly any pig bones occurred, and those found may well have belonged to wild animals. There is no positive evidence that the villagers practised agriculture, nor, despite the proximity to the bay, was fishing important. On the other hand, limpets and other shell-fish were regularly gathered, as immense accumulations of shells show. While whalebone was utilised, stranded animals probably supplied all the material detected.

For clothing the villagers probably relied upon the skins of their beasts. Many of the tools found seem best adapted for dressing or piercing skins, whereas textile appliances are absent. They decked themselves with beads made from the bones of sheep, the incisor teeth of cattle, the teeth of killer-whales and walrus or narwhal ivory. Small stone cups, containing red, yellow or blue pigments, suggest body painting.

Of the remaining crafts the villagers made pottery of exceptionally poor quality. There can have been little scope for carpentry in the treeless, windswept island. Indeed, much of the interest of the village lies in the fact that articles of furniture, such as beds, normally made of perishable wood, were here perforce translated into stone. The stonework was of a comparatively

high order. Though the chert tools and stone axe-heads are inferior to the normal Stone Age products, we found some implements, such as the spiked "balls," testifying to an incredible dexterity and patience.

The community was self-sufficing. Not a single fragment of material foreign to Orkney Mainland nor manufactured in any other known centre of culture has ever been found at Skara Brae to testify to any sort of trade or commerce. Coined money was, of course, unknown.

### *Description of the Ruins*

#### *Period III*

On entering the enclosure the visitor has on his left the outer wall of the easternmost hut in the village, No. 4 on the plan. On the east a section of the original outer face of the hut wall is still exposed, running across the ruins of an earlier structure, No. 4'. The bottom course of this wall is formed of massive blocks on edge with small stones fitted very neatly into the corners. It was coated with a layer of blue clay, 9 in. thick, to keep out the damp. At a later stage in the history of the village a midden platform some 9 ft. wide was built round this hut and the adjacent hut, No. 5. Portions of the retaining wall supporting this platform are still visible.

At its foot are the fragmentary remains of a slab pavement. On to this paved area, *passage A*, the main artery through the village, debouched at the east end. This alley forms a convenient guide in a perambulation of the ruins.

The first opening on the left is the passage, 12 ft. long, leading into

*Hut 4*.—It is narrowed by the door jambs of the hut. Just inside the jambs the bar-hole is visible. A stone bar for securing the door was found in position in the hole in the sixties. The bar-hole runs through into a beehive cell opening on to the interior of the hut to the right of the door. A carved stone ball was found in the cell in 1928. There is a second beehive cell, very perfectly preserved, in the rear wall just opposite the doorway. A shallow drain, covered with slabs (now invisible), leads from this cell under the hut floor to join a second that runs from hut 4 eastward across hut 4. The pillars of the dresser may be seen to the left of the cell entrance. Hut 4 was built up against the east wall of hut 5. The dividing walls were, however, breached by excavators in the sixties, exposing an instructive section across the double walls.

Returning to the main passage, A, one sees, still on the left, the entrance to a cell in the bastion between huts 4 and 5. The floor of this little chamber, 1 ft. 3 in. above the pavement of the passage, is itself the roof of a tiny cell entered from hut 5. A little farther on, on the right, is the doorway to

*Hut 3.*—The northern and eastern walls had already been washed away last century and the storm of 1925 demolished other pieces of furniture—the uprights of a “dresser” and several tanks—shown in earlier plans. The outlines of a small cell on the left of the door can still be made out.

Just in front of hut 3 between the sea walk and passage A is a hatch. This gives access to a sewer 12 to 20 in. deep and 1 ft. 4 in. to 3 ft. 4 in. wide roofed with lintel slabs 3 ft. 9 in. below the pavement of passage A. The sewer, which runs under the passage in one direction and seaward in the other, was probably constructed before period III.

Passage A begins to descend gently from the entrance to hut 4. A triangular cell, 6 ft. wide by 4 ft. 6 in. deep, will be noticed on the left. Immediately beyond it is a sort of bench overlooked by a window from hut 3. About this spot Mr. Watt found an incomplete human skeleton. The passage is here traversed by a slab on edge forming a step down. It may mark the site of a gate of which the upright slab would be the sole surviving jamb.

*Hut 5* is entered immediately beyond this point. The doorway has been destroyed by earlier excavators but is shown complete in a plan published in *The Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 1868. The hut is otherwise well preserved, notably the central fireplace, the beds on either side, the pillars of the dresser against the rear wall and the tanks in the corners and under the dresser. A beehive cell in the rear wall was entered from below the latter. A very ruinous cell in the left-hand rear corner is paved with slate and is served by the drain already mentioned as running across the floor of hut 4. A square slab of freestone in the wall behind the left-hand bed blocks the entry to a very narrow creep, never more than 2 ft. 6 in. high and in places only 10 in. wide, that leads eventually to the cell, previously mentioned, in the bastion between huts 4 and 5. The cell was about 3 ft. square and contained a large stone mortar (now visible on the turf above) and two whales' vertebrae. A peculiarity of hut 5 is the window piercing the front wall to the left of the door and looking on to passage A. It is the only instance of a window in the village and may indicate that passage A was never roofed east of the supposed gate mentioned above.

Hut 1 opens on the right of passage A, a few feet beyond the door to 3. The entrance is perfectly preserved, the walls being faced with slate slabs perforated for the bar-hole, which is controlled by a cell on the left. The rear wall of the hut, including the window, on the seaward side is a reconstruction by Mr. Watt. There were originally two cells in it, one in the right-hand corner, served by a drain, and the other behind the dresser. The latter is original and the remaining fittings are well preserved. Note particularly the "bed-posts" on the left and the paved enclosures in the two corners. A stone axe-head was found by Mr. Watt in the keeping-place above the right-hand bed, while the large stone basin or mortar lay, where it stands to-day, near the hearth. Two cells survive; one, opening just on the left of the doorway, commands the bar-hole of the door and a spy-hole looking out on to the main passage. A low door in the left-hand fore corner of the hut gives access to a narrow passage running between the walls of huts 1 and 2 and leading to a small cell, 4 ft. square and 3 ft. 4 in. high, between the front wall and passage A. At one time this cell had been entered from passage A, the doorway, roughly blocked up in antiquity, being still discernible. A hoard of 2,400 beads, several pendants and pins, and a whalebone dish filled with red pigment were discovered in this cell in 1928. It should be noted that both huts 1 and 3 are later than hut 1, having been built on to it.

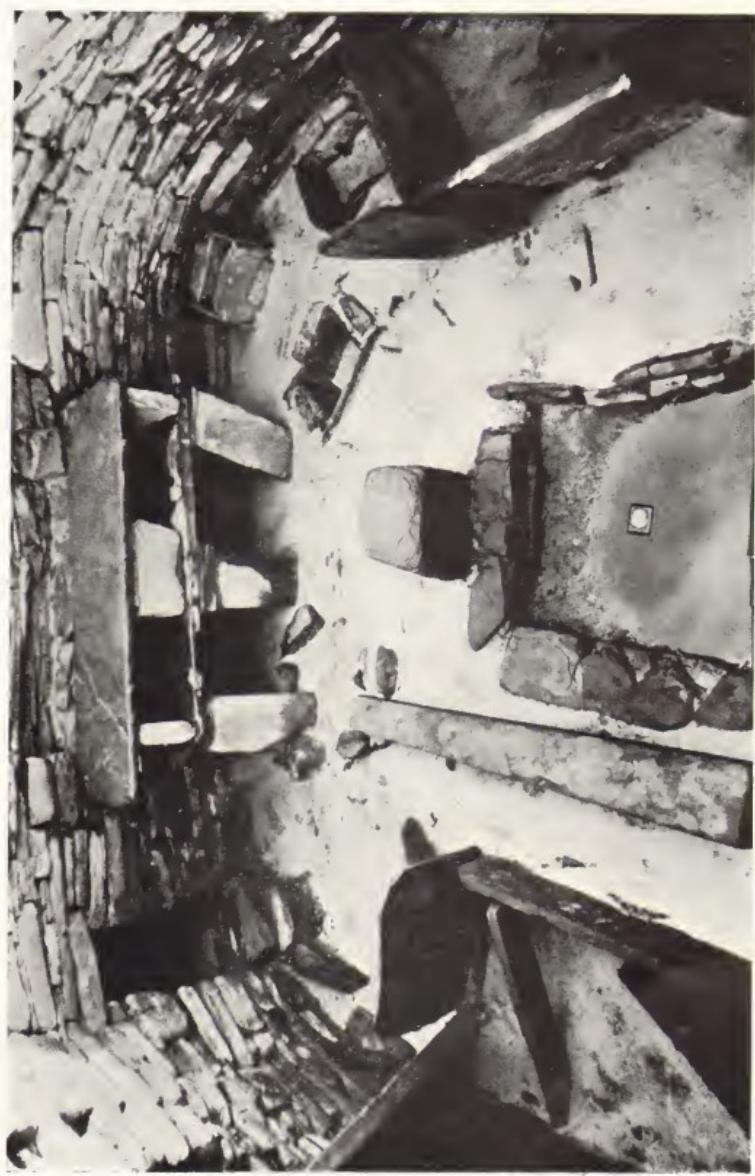
Passage A is still roofed with the original lintel slabs in places beyond the door to hut 1. Originally the slabs were covered by a layer of midden, a foot or more deep, that ran right up to the edges of huts 1, 3, 1 and 2. Passage A was, in fact, just a long burrow through this mound of refuse, the summit of which may be still seen below the turf and drift sand in a sort of pillar, left standing in 1930. The same heap originally stretched continuously over the area now occupied by a turf slope south of passage A, right to hut 7.

A doorway on the left of passage A now gives on to this area. The door had apparently been designed to give access to a hut, 6, built up against the outer wall of hut 3. To make room for this structure a section of the retaining wall, supporting the midden platform round hut 3, had been demolished. But hut 6 had never been completed. Its door actually led into a sort of cell whose flimsy walls were too ruinous to conserve.

Hut 2 is eventually reached on the right of passage A, the door proper being preceded by a sort of tiny antechamber or "hall." The hut is the smallest in the village and is built on to hut 1. The rear wall has been badly ruined, but the outlines of two cells are

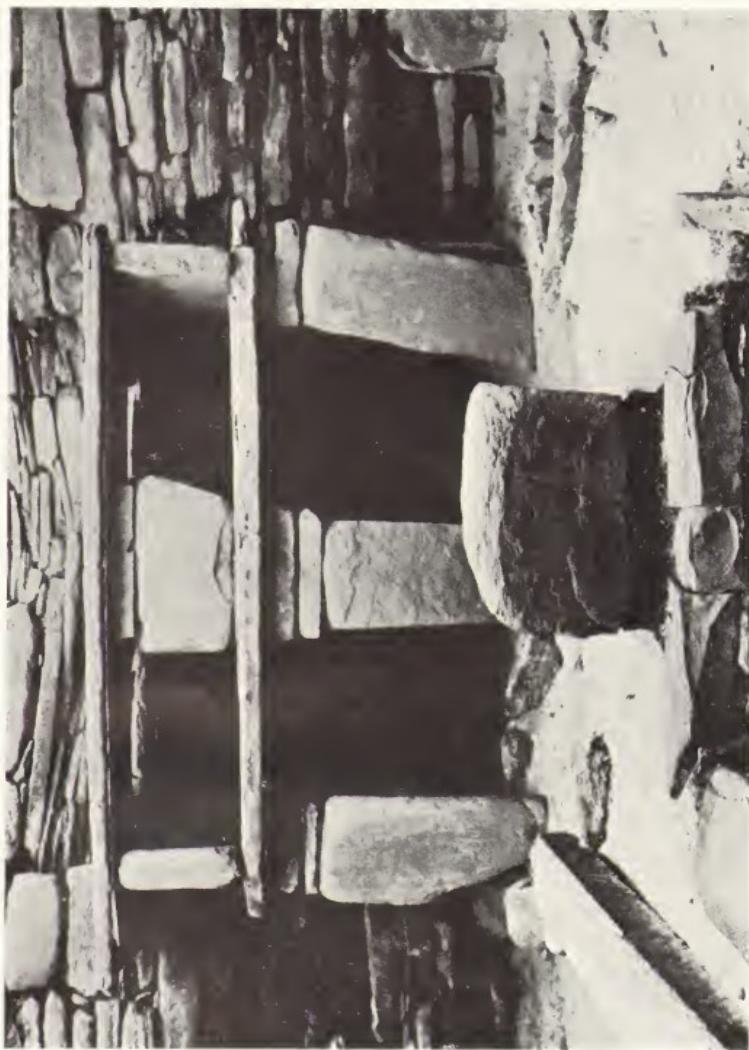


HUT 7. LOOKING TOWARDS THE ENTRANCE



HUT 7. SHOWING BEDS, DRESSER, FLOOR-BOXES, HEARTH AND CELL DOORWAY

CLOSE-UP OF DRESSER, HUT 7





THE OUTER WALL AFTER EXCAVATION

still distinguishable in it as well as the supports of a dresser in front of the left-hand cell. Just behind the central hearth may be seen the stamp of a stone slab on end that once stood 18 in. high but is now decaying. Bone adzes and unfinished beads were found on the floor between the hearth and the beds. One of the bed-posts on the right is perfect, but on the left posts are absent, the end slabs of the beds being made specially tall in compensation. There is an anomalous pillar on the left of the door and a keeping-place above its lintel.

Opposite the entrance to hut 2 a side passage, B on plan, joins the main alley. Its floor is now 1 ft. 8 in. below the pavement of passage A. A huge accumulation of limpet shells was found filling the passage B up to the level of passage A, when it was cleared in 1918. Passage B leads downward under the midden, its floor at its farther end being about 2 ft. lower than at its junction with A. The passage of course originally ran under a midden accumulation several feet deep. It was probably interrupted by a gate 15 ft. from its mouth and seems to terminate in a sort of cell behind the inner wall of hut 7.

But just in front of the mouth of this cell passage B is joined on the left by a third alley, termed passage C. The latter was originally roofed over and buried in midden, but in the first 12 ft. the roofing slabs had collapsed in antiquity, allowing the superincumbent refuse to fall into the passage after the latter had been filled with only about 2 ft. of drift sand.

Hut 7 opens on to this section of passage C. It is the most perfect dwelling in the village and has now been covered with a glass roof to ensure its continued preservation. The doorway, paved and faced with "slate" slabs, resembles that of hut 1, save that the end of the bar-hole is controlled from the cell opening on to passage B, not on to the interior of the hut. Immediately behind the fireplace is a cubical block of stone. The long slab lying to the left of the hearth was probably originally a pillar. In its fall it crushed a pot, fragments of which were found beneath it in 1918. On the right of the entrance is an enclosed dais; on its pavement we found a large basin of whalebone, a stone mortar, and two cooking pots filled with animal bones. In the left-hand front corner a tiny whalebone dish, full of red pigment, stood embedded in the floor. Two stone mortars were set in the floor in the corresponding rear corner, while close beside them lay two bone adzes and a shovel made from an ox's shoulder-blade. The beds, dresser, tanks and keeping-places are thoroughly typical, but the solid block of masonry on the left of the doorway and the numerous "pigeon-holes," looking suspiciously like joist

holes, in the topmost courses of the walls, deserve notice. The upper edge of the slab bounding the right-hand bed bears a series of deeply incised markings, worn away over most of its length but clearly visible where the slab was protected by the "bed-posts." The markings suggest an inscription but may after all be merely decorative.

The wall behind the bed is partially faced with a thin slab. The latter rests on a horizontal slab, projecting from beneath the wall flush with the floor of the bed. This slab covered a grave in which lay the skeletons of two old women buried in a crouched attitude on their sides. These bodies had evidently been deliberately interred here beneath the foundation of the hut wall. Though the women were not necessarily sacrificed for the occasion, the idea doubtless was that their ghosts should help to sustain the wall. This is just a case of a widespread practice alluded to in the Biblical phrase describing the walls of Jericho as "founded upon his first-born." The cell in the back of the hut is of the beehive type, 4 ft. 3 in. high, and was found to contain a small hoard of beads and pendants and a broken pot.

Passage C continues beyond the door of hut 7 between the walls of that structure and older dwelling of period II. The roofing slabs are missing until the north-east corner of hut 7 is reached. There the passage is narrowed by an extra facing wall, built on to the outside of hut 7, to a width of only 1 ft. 10 in. At this point a beehive cell, 3 ft. 3 in. high and about 4 ft. in diameter on the floor, opens off on the left. The passage itself runs on with its original roof intact, curving round the outside of hut 7. It slopes up gradually in so doing till its pavement is 4 ft. above the floor of hut 7. At the corner there are indications of a gate. Seven feet beyond the gate the roofing slabs come to an end, and a gap in the left-hand wall leads up and out on to the original surface of the midden heap. The passage itself runs on for 12 ft. and then stops short just behind the beehive cell in hut 7. Beyond its end may be seen the remains of the intrusive stone cist or coffin which contained the body of a young woman. As already remarked this burial had nothing to do with the original occupation of the site and was laid down when the ruins were already buried in sand.

On the opposite side of hut 7 a sort of gallery, 2 ft. 2 in. to 2 ft. 10 in. wide, and paved with slabs at a height of 4 ft. 10 in. above the hut floor, ran partly round the structure and across the roof of the cell at the end of passage B. The function of this gallery is unknown. It might conceivably have continued as a second storey over passage C to the gap above the door to

hut 7. But it was actually found full of midden and may have been intended as a sort of damp course only.

Returning to the main passage A, we have a section 14 ft. long over which the original roofing slabs had become so badly cracked before the passage was cleared that they had to be removed. It ends in a gate formed by two slabs projecting from the side walls to serve as jambs with a space only 1 ft. 9 in. wide between them. They support a freestone lintel 3 ft. 3 in. above a transverse projecting sill. Just inside, i.e. east of, the jambs are bar-holes. The bar slid in a specially built channel in the midden on the left.

Seven feet beyond the gate the passage is again constricted by a second pair of jambs, 1 ft. 9 in. apart, supporting a flagstone lintel 3 ft. 3 in. from the floor. Some of the stones on the left-hand side of this outer gate bear rudely scratched geometric designs, while a stone in the right-hand wall of the passage, just beyond the entry to hut 2, shows markings formed by battering or "picking" its surface. Beyond the outer gate the passage contracts once more and then debouches on to a paved area.

*The Market Place*, as this has been nicknamed, was never roofed over and was found full of pure drift sand. Its floor consists of two layers of slabs resting on a blue clay bedding. A test pit sunk here had to pass through 7 ft. 9 in. of refuse, interrupted by sandy layers, before reaching bed rock. On the right of the Market Place stands

*Hut 8*.—This structure, alone among all the buildings unearthed at Skara Brae, stands entirely free of the midden. Its outer wall, exposed all round to the elements, rests on heavy slabs set edgewise in the same blue clay bedding as supports the Market Place pavement. The type of construction has been noted outside hut 4. The outer wall supported a platform of rubble masonry around the hut proper.

The hut is at present entered through a porch, built on to its southern end on the western side of the Market Place. There are traces of an earlier entrance just in front of the porch. The porch is very flimsily built. It was covered with a flat "slate" roof and had originally boasted a second entrance on the west opposite to the present doorway that gives on to the Market Place. One jamb of the old west entrance is still visible from the outside, but the gap had been blocked up and an additional corbelled lining built up inside the present outer wall.

Hut 8 itself is entered from the porch by a doorway equipped with the usual bar-holes. Inside the door on the right is a secondary buttress, perhaps connected with the blocking of the original

entrance. The structure is anomalous in several respects. There are no tanks let into the floor nor built beds. On the other hand, there are wide alcoves on either side of the hearth corresponding in position and dimensions to normal beds. Instead of a dresser there seems to have been a deep recess in the rear wall partitioned off from the main chamber by a fence of thin slabs on edge. Within the apsidal area, thus cut off, is a rectangular paved space framed by two stout slabs standing on edge at right angles to the frontal fence. This area was found to be packed with volcanic stones fractured by heat. In the rear wall is a gap 1 ft. 3 in. wide interrupted only by a very low sill stone. The purpose of this annex is not known. It is indeed doubtful whether the hut, as a whole, was used as an ordinary dwelling. An immense number of chert chips, found on the floor, certainly prove that a chert-knapper worked in it. Moreover a number of stones in the wall bear finely engraved or scratched patterns. A design of hatched lozenges on a smooth stone to the right of the doorway is the best attempt at a pattern in the village. A pillar of sandy flagstone that originally stood beside the hearth also bore rather obscure patterns formed by battering with a blunt implement.

The Market Place is bordered on the south by a rather flimsy retaining wall that seems to end abruptly flush with the west side of hut 8. Between this wall and the hut porch is a paved way that forms a sort of unroofed continuation of passage A. The pavement, however, stops short by the west door of the porch. The blue clay bedding continued beyond this point for some distance, dipping steeply downwards, but no further traces of buildings have come to light. Test pits indeed show that hut 8 not only marked the western limit of the settlement in period III but also that the older midden heap, on which the Market Place and hut 8 stand, never extended much farther in this direction.

On reaching the Market Place from passage A a paved way is seen leading out seaward between the walls of huts 2 and 8. The end of the paving has been disturbed by the waves, but it seems merely to have led out on to the midden surface. On the left of the Market Place a corresponding paved way, termed *passage F*, leads in a south-easterly direction. This way may indeed once have been roofed over. Its left-hand wall merely serves to retain the midden heap and indeed forms the south-eastern boundary of the central accumulation of refuse. After twenty-one feet this wall breaks off, but at its corner there is a narrow cell originally roofed with horizontal slate slabs. One of the upright slabs of the cell bears incised marks and small round pits.

The right-hand wall of passage F, lettered *a* on the plan, though everywhere very ruinous, continues further than the paving so as to form with the outside wall of hut 7 a sort of passage descending along the surface of the old period II midden heap. There was no compact midden behind wall *a* but rather drift sand interrupted by thin layers of midden material. On the uppermost of these, deposited when passage F was already partly choked with sand, a slab-paved track leading out from the Market Place had been laid down and is still partly visible. To make room for it a strip of wall *a* had been broken down so that it no longer joins on to the south wall of the Market Place. Two walls at present run from the east corner of the last-named wall. The later of these, lettered *b*, has been uncovered for a distance of 30 ft. and certainly continues still farther south. In it are two gaps which gave access to very flimsy cell-like structures of stone, perhaps pens for lambs or calves. The wall with its annexes rests on a layer of midden material about 6 in. thick. Under this is a layer of sand.

The midden layer (and, at the corner, wall *b* itself) runs over the stumps of an older wall, *c*, that runs south-west. At its foot is a pavement of thick slabs, some of which are carved. This paving rests on the same blue clay bedding as the Market Place and hut 8. Beneath this comes 7 to 8 ft. of older refuse.

The function of all these flimsy walls is unknown. All seem to be built up against banked sand. Possibly, therefore, they were erected in the vain hope of checking the encroachment of sand dunes advancing from the south-west (the direction of the most prevalent wind). On the surface of the dunes, formed by each temporary check, midden material may have been deliberately laid down or have been formed by the droppings of cattle straying on the sands.

There are no indications of any important structures of period III beyond the limits of the existing excavations. And except along the line of wall *b* even the older midden deposits upon which the extant village stands are known to have been thinning out.

#### *Structures of Earlier Phases*

As already noted, the present huts stand upon the refuse accumulated in earlier periods and even upon the ruins of older structures. Some of these have been laid bare and are still visible. On the removal of the great block of midden that once ran continuously across the roof of passage A right to the edge of the wall round hut 7 one such structure termed

Hut 6' was exposed. It seems at one time to have opened on to what is now passage C, almost opposite the entry to hut 7. All that are now visible are the hearth and the stumps of the walls (a stone in the north wall bears an engraved pattern). The hut floor was buried by a deposit of sand, 18 in. to 2 ft. thick. Over this and the wall stumps lay a bed of blue clay upon which the walls of the existing hut 5 and the retaining wall of the surrounding midden platform rested.

In the grass slope between this early hut and passage A is a hatch. This gives access to a built sewer, the walls of which are 2 ft. 6 in. to 3 ft. 6 in. high. The channel seems to have run eastward from beneath passage B; it was traced under the west wall of hut 5 and found to open into a ruinous oval chamber beneath that hut's floor. The outlines of the chamber are now marked by lead tape on the floor of the hut. The chamber may have been a cistern or a sump. In any case it had collapsed and been filled in before hut 5 was built.

A huge block of midden sloping south-east once extended from the back of huts 4 and 5 to the south-east corner of hut 7. A large slice of this has been removed, exposing two huts of period II numbered respectively 9 and 10. Over hut 9 no less than seven distinct layers of midden, each separated by thin streaks of sand, could be distinguished. Five of these layers, with a total thickness of just under 5 ft., were banked up against the retaining wall of the platform round hut 5 and must therefore have been laid down after its erection. The wall in question itself rests on a sixth layer of midden that runs over the wall-stumps of hut 9.

Hut 9 is the best preserved structure of period II. It possesses the usual central hearth, a pillared dresser against the rear wall and a beehive cell in the corner. One cheek of the door may still be discerned with the bar-hole intact, but most of the front wall had been disturbed when the cell opening off passage C had been built. The beds are not built out from the side walls, but take the form of wide alcoves on either side of the hearth. They are partitioned off from the rest of the chamber in the normal way by large slabs on edge. The back wall of the right-hand bed-alcove is preserved to a sufficient height to show a marked inward corbelling especially at the corners. This alcove was in fact a corbelled apse, and the whole hut may once have been four such corbelled apses grouped round an open space, 6 by 7 ft. square in area, in which stood the hearth. The preservation of the right-hand wall is due to its incorporation in the wall of passage C which remained in use throughout period III if it were

not built then. On the floor of the hut were found potsherds and bone tools, similar to those from later dwellings, and a piece of deer's antler perforated and hollowed out at one end to serve as the mount for a stone axe-head.

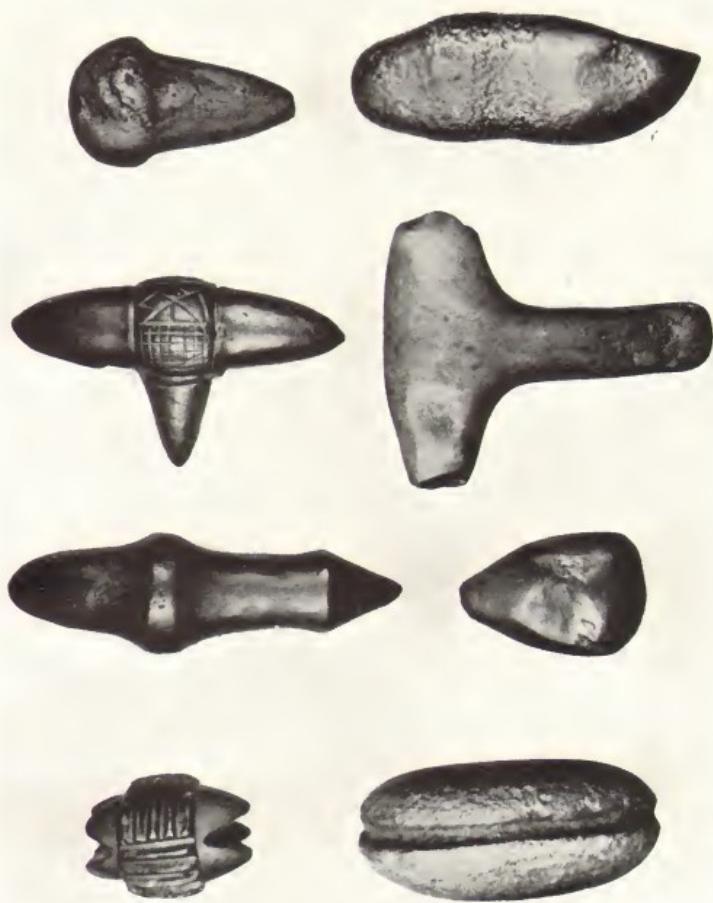
*Hut 10* is completely ruined, only just enough surviving of the walls to make the general outline distinguishable. A cell in one corner and the three uprights of a dresser may also be recognised. Two stone axe-heads, some broken bone pins and several smashed pots, most richly decorated, lay on the floor. This was covered with sand, partly overlaid with a greenish deposit that seems to represent the discharge from a drain, perhaps from an early version of the drain from hut 3. Upon this discharge rested a very broken pavement which ran over the stumps of the hut walls. The wall supporting the platform round hut 4 rested on this pavement. The stone box, shaped like a normal hearth, but paved with a stone slab and unmarked by fire, to the east of the hut, may belong to the same period as the paving. Its use is unknown.

*Hut 4'* finally lies to the east of hut 4. Indeed the east wall of the latter hut runs across the floor of the older structure. Hence only a segment of the latter is visible, and to expose even this, it was necessary to remove a section of the wall supporting the platform round hut 4 (the latter was in any case in a bad state of preservation). Of the hut there survive the right-hand cheek of the door, with the facing slabs perforated for the bar-hole, a beehive cell on the right of the door (blocked by a secondary buttress) and a recess, divided into two compartments, that was perhaps a dresser. A curious artificial pit-mark will be noticed in the end of the top slab of the "dresser's" central pier.

The wall to the left of the doorway had been pulled down when hut 4 was built. At the same time a hole was broken through the cell for the drain which flows across the floor of hut 4.

The door of hut 4' gives on to a stamped earth floor, 6 in. above the hut floor and belonging to a sort of passage or alley. In front of the door the foundations of a crescent-shaped structure can just be made out. This building may have been a porch, similar to that built on to hut 8 and designed, like that, to shelter the door from south-westerly winds. Across its wall-stumps runs a section of a later drainage channel, very neatly constructed. The "passage" through this porch leads downward on to an open-paved area sloping away to the south-east. The pavement, like that of the Market Place to the west, rests on an artificially laid blue clay bedding. Under this clay were found the ruins of a wall and a midden deposit nearly 3 ft. deep which must belong to period I in the history of the village.

A small number of implements of stone and bone, beads, and examples of pottery discovered during the excavations are exhibited at the monument. The major collection of relics is to be seen in the National Museum of Antiquities, Edinburgh, but representative selections have been deposited in the local museums at Kirkwall and Stromness and in the British Museum.



A SELECTION OF IMPLEMENTS FOUND DURING THE EXCAVATIONS



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Guide books and leaflets to many of the monuments are available and may be obtained at the monuments concerned or from the Sale Offices of H.M. Stationery Office at the addresses on cover page iv. Those at present on sale or in preparation are listed below.

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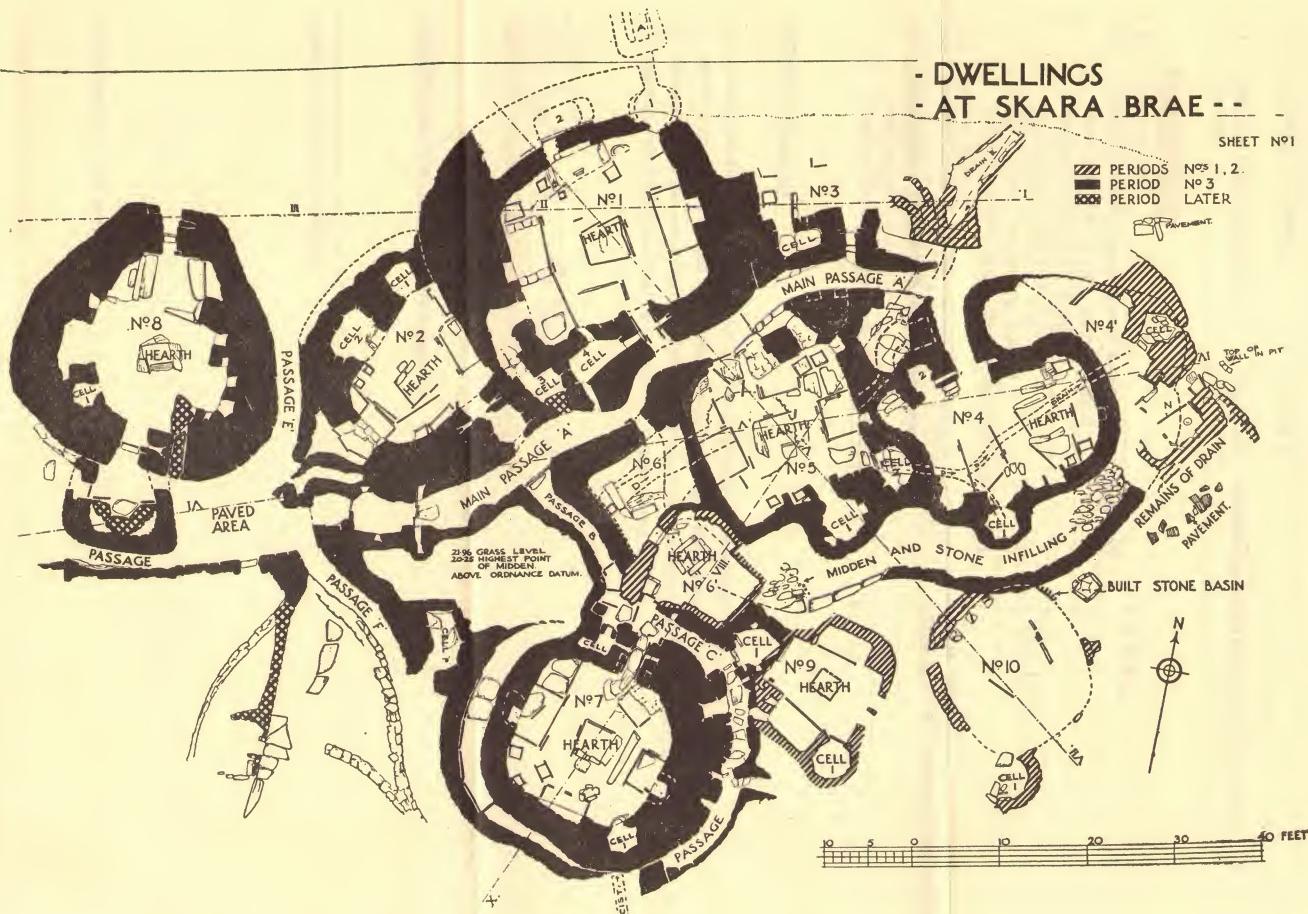
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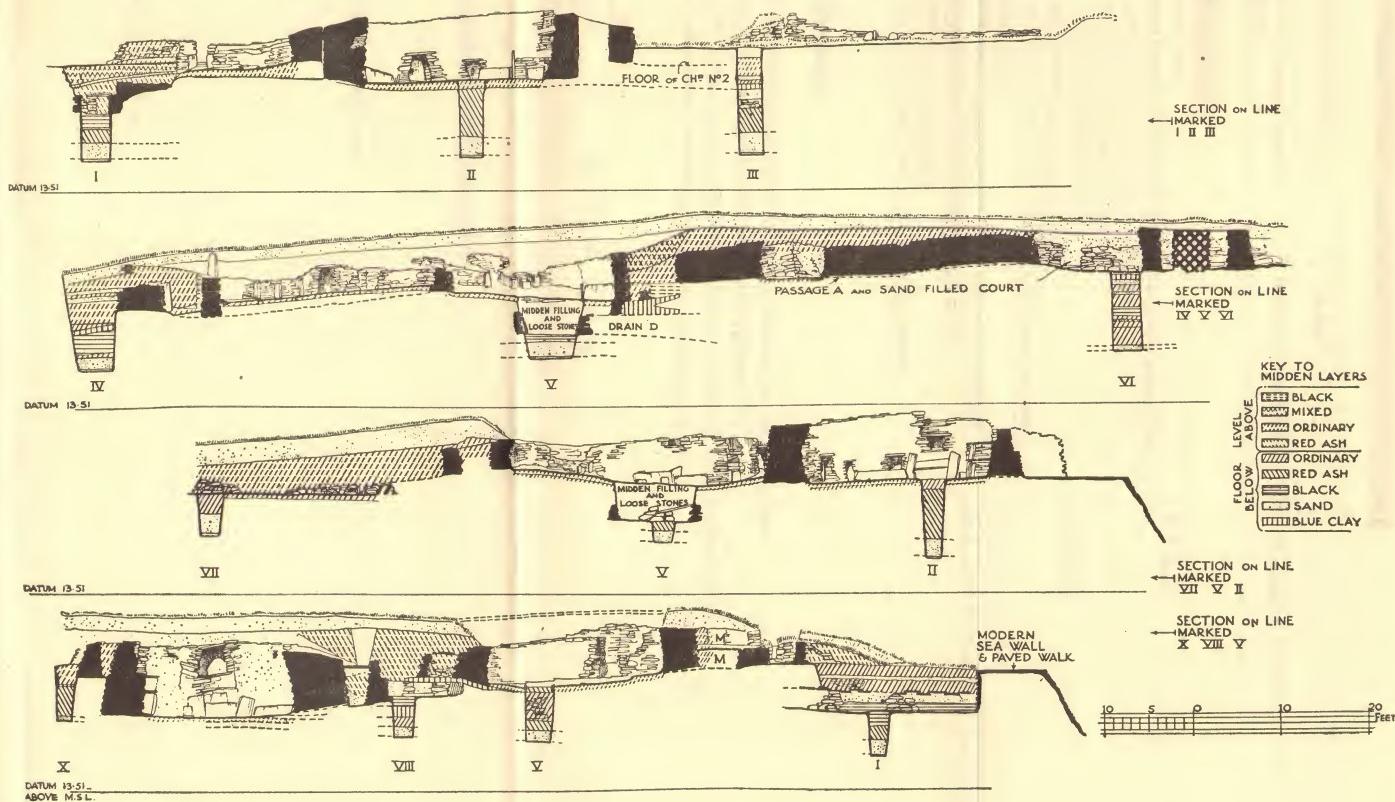
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